"SUMMER (2007) SET IN WITH ITS USUAL SEVERITY" (COLERIDGE) - IMPACTS ON TOURISM

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ABSTRACT Summer 2007 was highly anomalous over Europe with extreme wetness in NW Europe and extreme and persistent heat in SE Europe. Being very different from recent summers, how did tourists respond? In UK it was the wettest summer that most people under 50 have ever experienced. Was it forecasts or actuality that determined their holiday patterns? How important was weather compared with terrorist threats, rising inflation and other non-meteorological factors?

KEYWORDS: *Summer, tourism, United Kingdom*

INTRODUCTION

Smith (1990) showed that the level of tourism from the UK to the Mediterranean was influenced by precipitation in the UK during the previous summer. A study from the Netherlands (Lise and Tol, 2002) has extended this analysis and shown how models can be built linking tourist demand to climate. If the current mass travel movement is viewed as a kind of import substitution, then such trends as growth of the domestic short-holiday market in northern European countries could have an impact on the balance of payments of several countries. In the last few years there has been a big rise in the numbers of holiday-makers booking holidays at the last minute, rather than several months ahead. This change has been made possible by the rise in internet bookings, low-cost airlines and a general move away from the traditional package holiday booked with a travel agent. Late decision making on where to holiday allow for the weather in a particular year to play a more major role in the holiday destination decision. To further understand the role of a particular seasons weather on tourist demand a number of studies have been carried out in the last 5 years, monitoring holiday demand and price in individual years.

The heat and drought summer of Summer 2003

The three summer months, June – August 2003, broke both heat and drought records over a large area of Western Europe from Germany in the north to Spain in the south, and from Portugal in the west to Switzerland in the east. Temperatures were above normal over almost the whole of Europe, with anomalies reaching more than 5 degrees C in southern France. Drought conditions were widespread with the largest negative anomalies of precipitation further north in central and eastern Europe . National temperature records were broken in the UK, Switzerland, Germany and Belgium but not in France, Spain, Portugal or Italy. The first heatwave in Italy and Spain began in mid-June with Majorca recording 39.5 degrees C, a new record for the month. There was a slight lull in the hot weather in early July but by the middle of the month temperatures of between 38-40 degrees C were recorded in several Mediterranean countries. The most intense phase of the heatwave occurred from 4th-13th August and during this period 70 out of 180 stations in France broke all-time records and in 15 % of towns temperatures exceeded 40 degrees C. The intense heat was protracted, unremitting and severe and in many places in central, southern and western Europe, unprecedented .since at least 1500 (Beniston, 2004). This type of summer is entirely consistent with what computer models of the climate are saying will become more frequent over the next century.

The main impacts of the extreme weather on tourism appear to have been the following:-

Holiday demand was more related to the actual than the forecast weather. The prices of late-availability holidays were monitored on a day-by-day basis using the Web sites of both an up-market tour operator specializing in Greece and Turkey and a holiday consolidator for the period from July 16th -August 20$^{th.}$. At the beginning of the survey period holiday demand was lower than normal with prices quite weak, but after a delay of just a few days as the more unsettled weather began, prices began to rise by between 25-40 % on both web-sites. Peak prices were achieved in the first few days of August, following nearly two weeks of unsettled weather and continued until the hot, settled weather was re-established. After this they fell dramatically and by mid-August, normally an extremely busy time, demand had fallen and prices had eased considerably, in some cases to lower levels than had been prevailing at the start of the survey period. This limited survey suggests that for a wide range of differently priced Mediterranean holidays catering to different price-brackets, late-bookers tend to be

highly influenced by the prevailing, as opposed to the forecast, conditions in the home country. Such tactical booking is probably a result of several factors acting in tandem, for example the desire to achieve a bargain holiday by very late booking, the inability to plan holidays ahead because of work commitments, or possibly a dislike of foreign travel unless there are perceived weather advantages to be derived from it. By mid-August there were numerous press reports that camp sites in many holiday areas of the UK were full, and camping and holiday center operators reported exceptionally high booking rates.

Summer 2006—the warmest summer on record in the UK

The weather during summer 2006 was consistently warm and dry, and the summer included the warmest individual month ever recorded (July) and the highest temperature ever recorded in July. Although August was a somewhat disappointing month for holidays, especially in the east of the UK, the protracted good summer weather led to an increase in demand for holidays at home and a reduced demand for overseas holidays. There was a need to extensively discount the price of Mediterranean holidays, even in the peak season, and this widespread discounting subsequently led to the financial failure of a number of small and medium size operators.

Summer 2007—the wettest in the UK since 1912

Summer 2007 was highly anomalous over Europe with extreme wetness in NW Europe and extreme and persistent heat in SE Europe. Despite the poor weather, holiday demand was less buoyant than might have been expected. Non-climatic factors such as the terrorist threat and increased airport security ,rising inflation and probably plans made to holiday in the UK on the basis of the preceding good summers, meant that for many tour operators, summer 2007, although better than the previous year, was not outstanding and tactical discounting of holidays still took place. There was also considerable negative publicity concerning the repeated heatwaves in Greece and particularly the forest fires that ravaged the country towards the end of the holiday season. Following the fires demand for holidays to all of Greece dropped by nearly 20 %. Holiday demand was above normal after the traditional end of the peak season, as holiday-makers, feeling themselves deprived of summer sun, rushed to book autumn holidays in the Mediterranean.

A further factor that may well have been influential was the fact that the British Meteorological office issued a forecast in the spring of 2007 which suggested temperatures

were likely to be above normal in the UK. The text of this forecast was as follows: for the remainder of summer (i.e. until the end of August).

Temperature

Near average temperatures are likely to continue for the rest of July. However, during August there are signs of a change of weather type, with an indication that most regions will experience some periods with above average temperatures.

Precipitation

Above-average rainfall is likely to continue in most regions for the rest of July and at first in August. For the remainder of August current indicators favour a trend to drier-than-normal conditions for most of the UK.

In fact the mean summer temperature was almost exactly normal (compared with the 1971-2000 period),but it was still the coolest summer since 1998.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent summers provide a possible analogue to summers in the future and illustrate how holiday consumer taste may vary in the light of projected climate change. The balance between the attractions of holidays in Northern and Southern Europe varies from year to year and is closely related to prevailing conditions from one year to the next

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